

03/22/21 Monday

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'Very Concerning': Scientists Detect 55 Chemicals Never Before Reported in People
by [Mary F.](#)

Many of the chemicals in our bloodstream come from consumer products or other industrial sources. Scientists have also found that chemicals in the blood of pregnant women can also travel to their newborn children through the placenta.

In a recent [study](#) published this month in the journal Environmental Science & Technology, scientists at the University of California, San Francisco detected 109 chemicals in a study of pregnant women. Fifty-five of those chemicals had never been reported in people, while 37 were "mystery chemicals," meaning their sources and uses are unknown.

"These chemicals have probably been in people for quite some time, but our technology is now helping us to identify more of them," Tracey J. Woodruff, who was involved in the study, said in a [university release](#).

The scientists used high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS) to identify the chemicals. It allows for the detection of substances to the nearest 0.001 atomic mass units.

"It is alarming that we keep seeing certain chemicals travel from pregnant women to their children, which means these chemicals can be with us for generations," Woodruff said.

The study also found that the chemicals were found in the blood of the pregnant women's newborn children, suggesting that such chemicals can travel through the mother's placenta.

Out of the 109 chemicals found in the blood samples, 40 are used as plasticizers, 28 in cosmetics, 25 in consumer products, 29 as pharmaceuticals, 23 as pesticides and three as flame retardants. In addition, seven of the chemicals are PFAS compounds. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are man-made chemicals used in applications like carpeting and upholstery.

In addition, 55 of the 109 chemicals not previously reported in people were found to have several different uses, such as being pesticides and plasticizers. However, 37 of those 55 chemicals have little or no information about their sources or uses.

"It's very concerning that we are unable to identify the uses or sources of so many of these chemicals," Woodruff said. "[The] EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] must do a better job of requiring the chemical industry to standardize its reporting of chemical compounds and uses. And they need to use their authority to ensure that we have adequate information to evaluate potential health harms and remove chemicals from the market that pose a risk".

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Biden Reportedly Ignored Warnings Signs, Briefings From Border Officials on Impending Migrant Crisis by [Mary F.](#)

The Joe Biden administration on Monday announced it will dispatch envoys to Mexico and Guatemala to help curb migrant traffic, as the White House struggles to contain a surge of migrants arriving from Mexico at the US border.

According to reports, the Biden administration ignored warning signs and briefings from senior Customs and Border Protection officials that a migrant crisis would occur at the US southern border.

"The administration knew it was going to happen and everything since [Biden took office] has been how to manage it. The response is to merely manage the processing - not to stem the tide," a senior Customs and Border Protection official told [Fox News](#).

This weekend, the [Washington Post](#) also reported that CBP officials briefed the Biden team that there could be a surge in unaccompanied minors attempting to cross the border.

Chad Wolf, the acting DHS secretary at that time, did not partake in the briefings, but said he talked to transition officials about the impending migrant crisis.

"It's one thing to hear it from political appointees, but career folks were telling them the same thing. They should have been better prepared," Wolf said. "And I know they were briefed in detail by CBP."

Since his entering of office, Biden has reversed a number of Trump-era immigration policies.

In addition to halting construction of the Mexico border wall, Biden has also eliminated the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which requires that migrants from Central American countries wait for asylum hearings outside the US. Biden also formally suspended the so-called "Asylum Cooperative Agreements" (ACAs) with Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Under the ACAs, also known as the "safe third country" agreements, the Trump administration could prevent people arriving at the border the option to seek asylum in the US. Instead, such people could fly to and seek asylum from other countries.

Biden has also issued an order affirming the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA is an Obama-era immigration policy that allowed young undocumented individuals who had arrived in the US as children to be given work permits, as well as a renewable two-year period of deferred action on deportation.

Some officials, including Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton, have called on Biden to extend public health exclusion to all migrants, and to reinstate both the "Remain Mexico" and "safe third country" policies.

"The Biden administration keeps saying that Trump somehow dismantled the immigration system. That's false. It was the Biden admin that dismantled three highly effective policies," Cotton told "Fox News Sunday" this week.

On Sunday, Mark Weber, a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), confirmed to CBS News that the number of migrant children in US custody has surpassed 15,000, with Republicans blaming the migrant crisis on Biden's divergence from former President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

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Sidney Powell Files Motion to Dismiss Dominion's \$1.3 Billion Lawsuit
by [Mary F.](#)

Dominion Voting Systems filed a defamation lawsuit in January against lawyer Sidney Powell, seeking at least \$1.3 billion for Powell's claims that the election technology company rigged the presidential election for Joe Biden.

In a motion filed in federal district court in Washington, DC on Monday, the former Trump campaign attorney asked a judge to dismiss the defamation suit filed against her by Dominion Voting Systems.

In her motion, Powell argued that the court doesn't have jurisdiction because the election technology company did not properly tie her supposed defamatory statements to Washington, DC. Powell in her request asked the judge to consider transferring the case to her home state of Texas if her motion to dismiss the case is rejected.

"All the allegedly defamatory statements attributed to Defendants were made as part of the normal process of litigating issues of momentous significance and immense public interest," [the motion reads](#).

In her filing, Powell said her claims about Dominion are protected by the First Amendment.

"In light of all the circumstances surrounding the statements, their context, and the availability of the facts on which the statements were based, it was clear to reasonable persons that Powell's claims were her opinions and legal theories on a matter of utmost public concern. Those members of the public who were interested in the controversy were free to, and did, review that evidence and reached their own conclusions -- or awaited resolution of the matter by the courts before making up their minds," the motion states.

If the case against Powell is dismissed, Dominion would not be able to take the case to trial, and Powell would have to present evidence that the claims about the company were true or she had a reason to believe such claims.

In an emailed statement to Bloomberg, Dominion attorney Tom Clare addressed Powell's motion.

"Powell's attempt to dismiss the case contradicts her claim that she wants to present her evidence in court. Dominion Voting Systems is eager for the case to move forward and intends to hold Powell accountable," Clare noted.

Dominion filed the lawsuit against Powell in early January, just days after former US president Donald Trump loyalists breached the US Capitol.

"The recent attacks on the democratic process are not singular or isolated events," Dominion CEO John Poulos told reporters at the time, [The Hill reported](#). "They are the result of a deliberate and malicious campaign of lies over many months. Sidney Powell and others created and disseminated these lies, assisted and amplified by a range of media platforms."

Dominion has also filed \$1.3 billion defamation lawsuits against MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell and former Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, accusing the pair of also tainting the company's reputation with their baseless groundless about voter fraud.

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US Spy Plane Makes Closest-Ever Pass to Chinese Territory, Flying 25 Naut. Miles Off Coast - Report
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US military has dramatically increased its daily spy plane flights near Chinese territory, with no area more intensely patrolled than the northern South China Sea, which connects to the Taiwan Strait and East China Sea.

A US spy plane made the closest pass to the Chinese coast ever recorded on Tuesday, flying just 25.3 nautical miles away.

Citing publicly available automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B) data, the South China Sea Probing Initiative (SCSPI) think tank reported on Monday that a US Air Force RC-135U Combat Sent spy plane had flown just 25.33 nautical miles from China's coastal waters. This was "the shortest distance US reconnaissance aircraft have reached from China's coastlines, based on public data so far," noted the think tank, which is connected to Peking University.

According to the images shared by SCSPI of the aircraft's flight path, the Combat Sent's closest pass to the Chinese coast was immediately off the coast of Shantou, a prefecture-level city in eastern Guangdong Province near the southern end of the Taiwan Strait.

Elsewhere in the northern South China Sea at the time, SCSPI noted a US Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and a US Navy EP-3E Aries, an electronic intelligence aircraft, were also on patrol. As [Sputnik has reported](#), the US has flown several daily spy plane flights across the South China Sea for more than a year.

The USAF has two Combat Sent aircraft, which have a variety of specialized equipment for "locating and identifying foreign military land, naval and airborne radar signals," according to [a reference page](#) on Military.com. Such an aircraft could be used to gather considerable information on People's Liberation Army radar equipment, such as those operating out of the Shantou Waisha Airfield, a People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) air base on the coast east of Shantou.

It's unclear what type of aircraft fly out of Shantou or other nearby air bases, but recent information [suggests J-10C](#) and [J-7E fighters](#) and [Y-8G electronic](#) countermeasures aircraft have flown from the area. However, the Combat Sent could also be tracking radar use by coastal defense installations, air defense systems, and more. The area is within the range of Taiwanese cruise missiles, and would likely face bombardment in the event of a shooting war between China and Taiwanese forces, making such information extremely useful.

. The RC-135U Combat Sent provides strategic electronic reconnaissance information to the president, secretary of defense, Department of Defense leaders, and theater commanders. US intelligence flights have not only increased in frequency, but have also gotten closer and closer to Chinese territory. Last July, a US Navy P-8A [Poseidon flew within](#) just 41 nautical miles of the Chinese coast off Zhejiang, just north of the Taiwan Strait, which was the closest pass a US spy plane had made in years. However, other US intelligence aircraft have also made very

close passes while [disguised as civilian](#) aircraft. However, SCSPI, which noted the US aircraft changing their International Civil Aviation Organization hex codes in mid-flight, gave no range information.

The incident comes at a time when US officials are ramping up their attacks on China. Prior to the 2+2 summit in Alaska with two leading Chinese diplomats last week, US Secretary of State Antony [Blinken accused China](#) of using “coercion and aggression” in the South China Sea by fortifying islands in the region to which it has made [claims that overlap](#) with other nations in the region.

“We’re united in the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, where countries follow the rules, cooperate whenever they can, and resolve their differences peacefully. And in particular, we will push back if necessary when China uses coercion or aggression to get its way,” Blinken added.

While the US has claimed China is bullying other nations with its claims, in reality Beijing is working closely with partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to draw up a “[code of conduct](#)” for the South China Sea to resolve many of the common issues surrounding claims to territory and waterways.

Last month, two US Navy aircraft carriers, hauling nearly 160 aircraft between them, conducted [joint military drills](#) in the South China Sea with their strike groups of other warships.

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Photos: 20-Foot-Long US Air Force Targeting Drone Washes Up on Florida Beach
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US military has a long history of accidentally losing, dropping, and firing some of its most potent weapons, including four nuclear bombs in a bomber crash near Greenland. However, sometimes the mishaps are a bit more innocuous.

Residents in a southern Florida town were a bit puzzled last week after they found a strange-looking orange rocket washed up from the sea. According to the US Air Force, it’s a drone used for target practice.

It’s big, it’s orange, it looks like a missile and it says US Air Force on the side. The residents of Boynton Beach, Florida could be forgiven for fearing it could be an unexploded military weapon of some kind.

According to the [Palm Beach Post](#), the beach was closed on Friday morning after someone found the rocket, but was reopened after it was deemed safe.

So what is it, exactly? According to the [Air Force Times](#), the device is called a BQM-167A aerial target system, and was almost certainly launched by Tyndall Air Base on the Florida Panhandle, which is on the opposite side of Florida from the Atlantic-facing Boynton Beach. That means it had to have gotten caught in the Gulf Stream and floated for perhaps two or three months to get to its present location.

The drone, which resembles a missile with a rocket engine attached at an odd angle, is made out of carbon fiber and epoxy resins and used for target practice for both aircraft and surface units.

"The system can be deployed to provide a threat-representative target for the test and evaluation of new air-to-air weapons systems of the USAF and the US Department of Defence (DoD)," [Airforce Technology noted](#). "The aerial target system is also used to provide training for aviators in an air-to-air combat environment."

While it's unclear which exercise the wayward drone was launched in, Tyndall [announced in November](#) it was using them for its Checkered Flag 20-1 drills. Photos posted with a press release show several BQM-167A drones lined up ready to be launched.

"This is not the first time this has happened," USAF spokesperson Lt. Savannah Bray told the Palm Beach Post. "We are able to retrieve the vast majority of them, but every so often weather or winds pick up and we are unable to recover it, and they later wash up on shore."

In fact, the device has a phone number on the side to call in case you find it. It's understandable why they'd want it back, too: each rocket costs \$570,000. Typically, the Air Force sends out boats to retrieve them, but sometimes weather gets in the way.

This isn't the only recent strange encounter south Floridians have had with US military rockets: last month, Miami residents spotted evidence of a [mysterious rocket launch](#) off the coast that was later revealed to be a US Navy test of a Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile.

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Australian PM Morrison Pledges to 'Get This House in Order' in Emotional Speech Denouncing Sex Abuse

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In the aftermath of the latest wave of revelations of inappropriate sexual acts in Australia's Parliament House, Prime Minister Scott Morrison promised the nation's women he would do more to get the issue under control.

Earlier on Monday, a parliamentary [insider leaked photos](#) and videos to the media showing at least four staffers for members of Morrison's coalition performing lewd solo sex acts inside the building, including one performed on a female MP's desk.

"Other images were 'so bad' and 'shocking' that they couldn't be shown by the network at all," [news.com.au noted](#). The photos reportedly came from a Facebook Messenger group where staffers proudly swap the images. The insider revealed other information from the group, such as that the building's Prayer Room is commonly used by staffers for sex.

The outlet noted that at least one staffer has been fired in connection with the leaks.

The revelation also comes in the wake of accusations by Brittany Higgins, a member of Defense Minister Linda Reynolds' staff, who alleged she was raped by a male colleague in Reynolds' office after hours. Since she came forth, [two other women](#) have made similar claims about the same man.

The wave of revelations of abuse has [sparked mass protests](#) against sexual harassment and abuse of women, with tens of thousands protesting earlier this month in what Australian media has called the largest uprising of women ever seen in the country.

In response to the wave of scandals, Morrison pledged on Monday to “get this house in order.”

“These events have triggered, right across this building and indeed right across the country, women who have put up with this rubbish and this crap for their entire lives, as their mothers did, as their grandmothers did. It has been going on, we have been talking about it in this place for a month, they have been living with it for their entire lives,” Morrison noted.

“The women listening to me today know that to be true, so as much as it has been a topic of discussion here, and around the country specifically in relation to these disgraceful acts, it is something that has been the lived experience of Australian women for a very long time, and I welcome the spotlight that has now been placed on this,” he said.

Morrison also apologized for having invoked his wife and daughters in his initial response to Higgins’ revelations, saying that “no offense was intended,” but he also acknowledged that they had upset many people.

“There has never been a more important time for women to stand in this place,” he went on to say. “I want to see more women in this place, I have done anything to get more women in this place and I intend to do more.”

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NYPD Cop Arrested Again, This Time for Allegedly Shooting at the Atlantic Ocean
by [Evan Craighead](#)

New York City Police Department (NYPD) Officer David Afanador was notably the first cop to be arrested under the state's 2020 anti-chokehold legislation after he was seen pinning a man to the ground. Afanador is due back in court on Wednesday for this separate case.

Afanador, 39, was arrested by Long Beach, New York, authorities on Sunday morning, and later charged with criminal possession of a weapon and prohibited use of a weapon, the Associated Press [reported Monday](#).

Police investigating the initial report of shots fired on Long Beach Boardwalk said the 39-year-old officer, who has not been permitted to carry a firearm since his 2020 chokehold arrest, was spotted carrying a loaded Beretta M9 - a 9mm, semi-automatic pistol - and three 15-round magazines.

He and three other individuals were seen leaving Ocean Beach Park around 6:50 a.m. local time when they were stopped by authorities.

Police believe the off-duty NYPD officer was firing shots into the Atlantic Ocean and, at one point, handed the firearm to 36-year-old Jennifer Sonnick. Both Sonnick and Afanador are Long Beach residents.

Afanador has also been cited for violating the beach's alcohol prohibition, as he was carrying a Truly hard seltzer at the time of his arrest, and suspended without pay by the NYPD.

The 39-year-old previously pleaded not guilty to strangulation and attempted aggravated strangulation charges in June 2020 after he was captured on video using a chokehold banned by the NYPD since the early 90s, and banned state-wide since June 12, 2020.

"[A]n officer put his hand around a person's neck, and that [officer] was dealt with swiftly and was suspended," New York City Police Commissioner Dermot [Shea said](#) at the time.

However, Afanador's lawyer, Stephen Worth, has argued that his client was arrested "without a full and thorough investigation."

If convicted, the 16-year NYPD veteran faces up to seven years behind bars.

Be advised, the footage below may be disturbing to some audiences.

Afanador was previously acquitted in 2016 on charges related to the pistol-whipping of a New York teen.

According to the New York [Daily News](#), the 39-year-old has been the subject of eight Civilian Complaint Review Board investigations (involving 18 charges) since joining the police force back in 2005.

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'It's Not For You': Man Who Attended US Capitol Riot Bans Biden Voters From Coffee Shop
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Lisbon, Ohio, coffee shop owner Adam Newbold told reporters back in January that he believes the results of the 2020 US presidential election were "fraudulent." The pro-Trump business owner also maintained that he did not storm the US Capitol building on January 6 because he only went on the steps, and did not go past the doorway.

While most US business owners are welcoming any and all customers after a year of COVID-19-related closures and lockdowns, Newbold recently took to the web and rolled out a laundry list of persons unwelcome at C4 Coffee.

"If you voted for Joe Biden, don't buy our coffee, it's not for you," he said in a video posted [on Rumble](#). "If you feel that America is on the right track and there's nothing wrong with gender-neutral, don't know which bathroom to use, use whichever bathroom you feel like during the day... don't buy our coffee cause it's not for you."

Newbold, a retired US Navy SEAL, also emphasized in the video description that "Americans aren't blind and they aren't stupid. At least not all of us."

In his polarizing company advertisement, the coffee shop owner also recounted the riot on the US Capitol building, an incident he described as "a very volatile situation."

"I was there, I witnessed the patriotic angry Americans chanting, 'USA, USA,'" Newbold said, noting that although he was there, he did not participate in any illegal activity and remained outside the US Capitol building.

In a January interview with WKBN, Newbold said that he became enraged when he heard supporters of former US President Donald Trump breached the Capitol building.

No criminal charges have been leveled against Newbold in connection with the January 6 incident. The Ohio resident has also [spoken with](#) the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"The assertion that I or anyone with me had the intent to commit sedition or to overthrow the government is absolutely absurd. I feel I have stood strongly for the government, the president and the Constitution," he told WKBN.

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French Foreign Minister Summons Chinese Envoy Over 'Inadmissible' Comments on Researchers, Lawmakers
by [Evan Craighead](#)

On Friday, the Chinese Embassy in Paris, France, blasted researcher Antoine Bondaz - of French think tank Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) - as a "small-time hoodlum" and "ideological troll" with "anti-Chinese" beliefs. That same day, the embassy reiterated its 'One-China policy,' and denounced a potential French diplomatic trip to Taiwan.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian took to Twitter on Monday to announce he summoned Lu Shaye, the Chinese Ambassador to France and Monaco, over its "inadmissible" words and "actions against European elected officials, researchers and diplomats."

"I requested that the Chinese ambassador be summoned to remind him firmly of these messages," he concluded in a translated tweet.

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs also called on the Chinese Embassy in France to comply with the "basic rules enshrined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations associated with the functioning of a foreign embassy, notably with respect to its public communication."

"The insults against independent researchers and the controversy with French elected officials are unacceptable and do not have any place in the relations that the Embassy of China is tasked with helping to develop between France and China," the [Monday issuance](#) read. "It must respect the principle of separation of powers, as well as all of the Republic's laws."

Late last week, the Chinese Embassy in France warned Beijing "will take action accordingly" if French lawmakers decide to travel to Taiwan and violate the 'One-China policy' by engaging in diplomatic relations with Taipei.

"The people concerned can decide freely on their travel plans and their contacts," the embassy [statement read](#).

China has maintained that it views Taiwan as a breakaway province, and while the island has its own government, the 'One-China policy' states that there is only one sovereign China.

Bondaz, an outspoken critic of the Chinese government, was called out by Chinese envoy Lu and labeled, among many things, a "small-time hoodlum," "crazy hyena," "thug" and "ideological troll."

"There are people who want to see Chinese diplomacy become 'lamb-like', unflinching in the face of attack. That period is well and truly over," the embassy tweeted.

Prior to being called out by the embassy, [Bondaz tweeted](#) that "senators are free to meet with whomever they see fit" and "[i]t is not for Beijing, let alone an ambassador, to dictate what elected officials can or cannot do."

While the embassy [has defended](#) Lu's comments as "freedom of expression," the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs maintains the envoys comments were "unacceptable." Relatedly, France claimed on Monday that it "cannot accept" the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' [same-day announcement](#) of sanctions against 10 individuals and four entities, including MEP Raphaël Glucksmann.

At the same time, the US, European Union, Britain and Canada [have sanctioned](#) China over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

"The Chinese side urges the EU to realize the seriousness of its mistake, to examine its conscience, to correct the mistake, to stop teaching others on human rights, to put an end to the hypocritical practice of 'two weights and two measures,' and to stop interfering everywhere in the internal affairs of others, so as not to go further down the wrong path," the Chinese Embassy in France said Monday. "Otherwise, China will not fail to react more firmly."

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Cyberterrorism Seen as Bigger 'Critical Threat' to US Than Creation of Nuclear Weapons Abroad - Poll
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, the Biden administration blasted Russia and China over recent allegations that claim their respective governments organized hacking attacks against several US federal agencies and dozens of private sector companies. The Gallup poll was conducted shortly after US President Joe Biden addressed the issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A growing number of Americans believe cyberterrorism poses a larger to the US than international terrorism or the development of nuclear weapons, a new Gallup survey published on Monday has found.

The [poll](#) determined that growing concerns over cyberterrorism or the "use of computers to cause disruption or fear in society" was seen as a "critical threat" by 82% of the respondents. Another 16% of the group acknowledged that cyberterrorism was "important, not critical." The possibility of North Korea and Iran both developing nuclear weapons ranked second (77%) and third (75%) on the list, with international terrorism and, of course, the "spread of infectious diseases throughout the world" rounding out the top five.

Researchers stated in their findings that their new data only marked an increase of nine percentage points when it came down to threats posed by an infectious disease, highlighting the current effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase was noted when figures were compared against a 2016 Gallup survey.

Additionally, survey officials concluded that there was no partisan split by respondents when it came to labelling cyberterrorism, development of nuclear weapons by North Korea and international terrorism as the US' top critical threats.

However, it was also noted that when it came down to nuclear weapons in Iran, China's economic power and threats posed by infectious diseases, all three topics were split along party

lines. Researchers found that Republicans were more likely to see Iran and China as a far larger threat, with the opposite being true for individuals who identified as Democrats. Other concerns listed on the survey included global warming, Russia's military power, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tensions between China and Taiwan, and the illegal immigration through the US-Mexico border.

Although some 58% of respondents indicated that global warming or climate change posed a critical threat to the US, less than half of those surveyed believed that the remaining four listed concerns amounted to a serious threat.

It's worth noting officials did state that 54% of participants agreed that while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was important, it was not seen as being a critical threat to US interests.

"The events of the past two years have affected Americans' perceptions regarding the type of threat that a number of issues and situations pose to the vital interests of the US," researchers concluded. "With Biden bringing a new perspective to many issues, this could influence Americans' future views of threat levels."

The recent findings published by Gallup came as the US has repeatedly spotlighted hacking attacks against several federal agencies and private sector groups. In fact, the survey sampling was carried out from February 3 to 18, moments after Biden [spoke with Putin](#) about the [SolarWinds hack](#). It also came as similar hacking reports emerged involving China.

Although the US has accused Russia of wrongdoing, going so far as reportedly [planning a cyberattack](#) in response to the SolarWinds attack, Moscow has rejected it played any role in the infiltration. Earlier, the Kremlin [issued a statement](#) indicating that the reported US response against Russia was "alarming" and would effectively amount to "international cybercrime." Gallup's new poll included responses from 1,021 adults within the US who were over 18 years of age. A margin of error was listed as four percentage points.

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Israeli Police Arrest Man Who Allegedly Threatened to Murder Yair Lapid Amid Heated Election by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Israeli residents are currently in the midst of a heated election cycle, the fourth of which has unfolded in the nation within the last two years. Recent polls suggest that the hotly contested election may end with a political deadlock between opposing parties.

An unidentified Israeli man was arrested and taken into custody on Monday after the individual allegedly threatened to murder Yair Lapid, the chairman of Israel's Yesh Atid party, police officials have revealed.

The 30-year-old individual hails from the Israeli city of Bet Shemesh in the Jerusalem District, and was detained by law enforcement authorities after posting threatening messages on an undisclosed social media platform. Officials indicated that the man had vowed to kill Lapid, even with the threat of imprisonment facing him.

According to [The Times of Israel](#), the detainee made the concerning remarks online when he was outside of the country. It's believed the individual may have been one of many who were stranded abroad as part of Israel's strict COVID-19 restrictions, which have been slowly lifted in light of Tuesday's highly anticipated election.

After having been tipped off to the incident, officials investigated the matter further and ultimately took him into custody moments after he flew into Israel earlier on Monday. Authorities have not yet indicated where the suspect was when the comments were first published.

In response to the developments, Lapid remarked that the reports would not hold him back ahead of the election, underscoring that "no one is going to scare us."

"The culture of hatred, division, and incitement will be replaced by a sane government that will unify all Israeli citizens," Lapid said in a statement obtained by the Times. "It all depends on you. Go vote and let sanity triumph."

Local media reports state the suspect will be undergoing further questioning, and be brought before the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court on Tuesday. Police are expected to request the court grant an extension for the individual's detention.

The online posts were not the first ever directed toward Lapid, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#), which reported that the opposition leader experienced similar circumstances in 2012 and in 2013.

This latest incident came amid a heated election cycle that has seen multiple violent altercations break out between supporters of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and those of his opponents. In fact, violence by Netanyahu supporters has seen an uptick as anti-Netanyahu protests have been held on a [weekly basis](#).

The election, however, is likely to continue to cause a stir among Israeli residents, as [recent polls](#) suggest that running candidates will miss the 61-seat requirement to form a government.

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Letter Written by Albert Einstein Months Before Start of World War II Hits Auction
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In 2018, a handwritten letter from Nobel Prize-winning physicist Albert Einstein sold at an auction in Jerusalem for \$39,350, just about doubling the house's \$20,000 asking price. The letter, dated August 1922, was addressed to Einstein's sister, Maja. It expressed his growing concerns about the rise of nationalism and anti-Semitism.

A letter written and signed by Einstein in the summer of 1939 is getting ready to hit the auction block this week in Los Angeles, California, with sellers expecting to collect thousands of dollars for the treasured correspondence.

Written in English, the letter was addressed to William Morris, a German-Jewish immigrant who relocated to the US and launched the renowned eponymous talent agency at the end of the 19th century. Einstein's letter, which is dated June 10, 1939, praises Morris' "splendid work" on helping Jewish refugees.

"The power of resistance which has enabled the Jewish people to survive for thousands of years has been based to a large extent on traditions of mutual helpfulness," Einstein wrote. "In these years of affliction our readiness to help one another is being put to an especially severe test. May we stand this test as well as did our fathers before us."

"We have no other means of self-defense than our solidarity and our knowledge that the cause for which we are suffering is a momentous and sacred cause," the letter continues.

"It must be a source of deep gratification to you to be making so important a contribution toward rescuing our persecuted fellow-Jews from their calamitous peril and leading them toward a better future," Einstein concludes.

In [announcing](#) the sale on Monday, the Nate D. Sanders Auctions house revealed in a posting that the letter was typed on Einstein's "personal blind-embossed letterhead" from [Princeton University](#), where he served as a scholar after arriving at the institution in the 1930s.

The posting details that although the "single page letter" from Einstein has "folds and small closed tear at top," it is still in "very good to near fine condition."

The decades-old item will be made available to interested buyers until Thursday. Its listed starting price is \$10,000.

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RPT - Expulsions of Migrants by Biden Administration 'Unfortunate' - US Rights Group

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's decision to continue expelling asylum-seeking migrants at the US border with Mexico is unfortunate because the United States has the resources and capacity to adequately address the issue, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Limon Garza told Sputnik.

"It's unfortunate that the expulsions of migrants is continuing," Garza said. "We have the capacity and resources north of the border for a safe, humane and orderly welcome for people. We must be forward-looking and re-imagine what asylum looks like at the US-Mexico border."

Last week, President Joe Biden said in an interview with ABC News that the vast majority of undocumented migrants crossing the US southern border are being turned away. Biden advised asylum-seeking migrants, who are mostly from Central America, not to make the journey to the United States and encouraged them to apply for asylum from their home countries once the US government sets up facilities to process their claims there.

The Biden administration has been required to open up at least four temporary care facilities to hold an influx of migrant children overwhelming US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities in hot spots along the US southern border.

A majority of migrants being apprehended at the border are fleeing poverty and violence in the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Data from CBP shows that about 317,590 migrants have been expelled or turned away immediately since October under a Trump-era public health-related policy known as Title 42.

The highest number of migrants expelled in fiscal year 2021 occurred in February with 70,183 expulsions.

The data also shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant increase from the 78,442 migrants apprehended in January. A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

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Huawei CFO Lawyer Says Canadian Officer's Refusal to Testify Must See Key Evidence Tossed

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - A Canadian federal police officer's refusal to testify in the extradition proceedings against Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou warrants the rejection of a key piece of government evidence, a lawyer representing the executive said.

Former Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) staff sergeant Ben Chang, who is accused by the defense of having covertly shared information about the Huawei Chief Financial Officer's electronic devices with the FBI, communicated his refusal to testify throughout the process, despite being flagged as key witness by government attorneys.

Scott Fenton, a member of Meng's extensive legal team, said that Chang's refusal to appear in court undermined the defense's ability to cross examine him on whether he shared Electronic Serial Numbers (ESN) information from the executive's devices, in violation of her charter rights and Canada's Extradition Act.

Furthermore, Fenton argued that Chang's refusal to testify should not only suggest that the former officer was not truthful in his original affidavit, in which he claimed that ESN information was not forwarded to the FBI and have this key piece of RCMP evidence tossed, but his action could undermine the entirety of the United States' extradition request through a legal term known as "adverse inference."

"We seek the two remedies... one, there be no reliance placed on Staff Sgt. Chang's affidavit for the truth of its contents; and secondly, that an adverse inference be drawn against him, that if he was cross-examined, had he not refused [to testify] his evidence would not support his credibility," Fenton told the court on Monday.

Should British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Heather Holmes make an adverse inference, it could strike a serious blow to efforts to extradite the Huawei executive and stay the case, an outcome sought by Meng's lawyers.

Fenton called Chang's decision "unprecedented."

The former federal agent now resides in Macau, a special administrative region of China, and has retained legal representation.

Meng's legal counsel also took issue with the RCMP wiping Chang's mobile device after he retired from the force in June 2019, saying such action amounted to "negligence."

Meng, the daughter of Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei, was arrested on December 1, 2018 at Vancouver International Airport during a layover stop at the request of the US government.

She is wanted by US authorities for her alleged role in violating sanctions against Iran. The Justice Department alleges that Meng committed financial transgressions by misleading

multinational financial conglomerate, HSBC, into approving more than \$100 million in transactions that contravened US sanctions on Iran from 2010 to 2014.

The arrests of Meng and two Canadian nationals - diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor – on charges of espionage in China, along with other disputes have reduced bilateral relations between the two countries to their lowest point in years.

The trial of the "two Michaels" - as the pair is referred to at home - began on Friday, with Kovrig's trial concluding earlier in the day without a verdict.

Both nations view the detention of their nationals by the other as political incidents.

The hearings in this extradition case are expected to conclude in mid-May.

Meng remains under house arrest in Vancouver, although is free to traverse the region in the company of state-imposed guards outside of her 11:00 p.m to 6:00 a.m. curfew.

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US Economy Recovering Faster Than Expected - Federal Reserve Chairman

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US economy is rebounding more quickly than expected but more needs to be done to correct imbalances in unemployment and other inequities, Federal Reserve Chairman Jay Powell said in the text of a testimony due to be delivered to Congress on Tuesday.

"The recovery has progressed more quickly than generally expected and looks to be strengthening," Powell said in the testimony released on Monday. "We welcome this progress, but will not lose sight of the millions of Americans who are still hurting, including lower-wage workers in the services sector, African Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups that have been especially hard hit."

The statement comes on the anniversary of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which distributed a record \$3 trillion in aid.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs at the height of business lockdowns in March and April as a result of the drastic measures taken to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. About 10 million of those jobs have not returned, according to recently published data. The US economy shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, after a 2.2 percent growth in 2019.

After the original \$3 trillion CARES Act approved in March 2020, Congress passed another \$900 billion in December under an extension to the bill tabled by the Trump administration.

Earlier in March, the Biden administration passed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan.

Powell has said that he expects US unemployment to continue declining from February's rate of 6.2 percent, while inflation expands 2.4 percent on the year against a projected 6.5 percent expansion of the economy.

"This is due in significant part to the unprecedented fiscal and monetary policy actions," he said. "More people held on to their jobs, more businesses kept their doors open, and more incomes were saved. But the recovery is far from complete, so, at the Fed, we will continue to provide the economy the support that it needs for as long as it takes."

The Federal Reserve has a mandate of creating maximum employment for the US economy at any one time - a target defined by a jobless rate of 4.0 percent or lower.

Powell estimated that the central bank's actions alone over the past year to boost employment has helped unlock more than \$2 trillion in funding to support businesses large and small, nonprofits, and state and local governments between April and December.

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Increasing Number of Illegal Migrants Caught in Busiest Section of US - Border Patrol

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The number of undocumented migrants apprehended in the busiest region of the US-Mexico border this month has already surpassed the total number of migrants apprehended in February, the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said in a press release.

"RGV [Rio Grande Valley] agents have encountered 25 groups of more than 100 people illegally entering the country this calendar year," the release said on Monday. "March has been a very active month for RGV, as illegal alien apprehensions thus far have surpassed February's total number."

The Rio Grande Valley sector stretches 320 river miles, covering 19 counties in the state of Texas. For many years, the region has been a major destination for migrants seeking asylum in the United States.

The latest CBP data shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant jump from 78,442 migrants that were apprehended in January. About 97,108 undocumented migrants have been apprehended in the Rio Grande Valley between October and February.

The significant increase in the monthly total of apprehensions in the Rio Grande Valley sector indicates that the overall number of apprehensions in the southern border in March will show a continuing spike in apprehensions as the federal government grapples with handling the worsening situation.

On Saturday, CBP agents in the sector apprehended a total of nearly 300 migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico and Belize.

A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

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UPDATE - Police Respond to Shooting at Store in Colorado, Multiple Fatalities Reportedly Witnessed

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Police officers have responded to a shooting at a local grocery store in the US state of Colorado, the Boulder Police Department said in a statement. One witness told ABC news that she saw multiple fatalities in the shooting.

"Active Shooter at the King Soopers on Table Mesa," the Boulder Police Department said in the statement on Monday evening.

One witness told ABC news that she saw multiple fatalities in the shooting.

However, the Boulder Police Department has not yet revealed whether there have been fatalities as a result of the shooting.

Local media footage showed the suspected gunman apprehended by authorities.

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Police Respond to Shooting at Grocery Store in US State of Colorado

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US Needs More Ships to Contain China, Russia - Senator

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States must accelerate building new ships for the US Navy to contain the growing sea power of China and Russia, Senator Roger Wicker wrote in an op-ed piece.

"China has about 350 navy ships compared to the US Navy's 298 vessels, and experts predict China's navy could be twice the size of our fleet by 2030. In addition, Russia has plans to construct a dozen new icebreakers over the next decade, building on their already-huge advantage in the polar regions. If we do not ramp up shipbuilding dramatically, it will be more and more difficult to prevent a future conflict with our adversaries," Wicker said in the article published in the Mississippi-based Daily Journal newspaper on Monday.

China, he added, presents the greatest threat to the US since it became the world's largest navy, threatens the free flow of commerce, and undermines the stability of its neighbors. At the same time, the US is losing influence in the Arctic Ocean to Russia, whose icebreaker fleet significantly outnumbers the American fleet by a 40 to 2 margin, he said. Besides that, last summer the Russian Navy conducted a massive military exercise off the coast of Alaska, Wicker added.

Wicker also calls on President Joe Biden to embrace the recent massive shipbuilding plan providing for 405 manned Navy ships by 2051.

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US Senate Panel to Discuss Wednesday Bill on Ukraine Military Aid - Schedule

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations plans to discuss on Wednesday a proposed legislation that calls for \$300 million in annual military assistance to Ukraine and will including a clearance to provide lethal aid, according to the panel's schedule.

The Ukraine Security Partnership Act of 2021 introduced by a bipartisan group of Senators also authorizes \$4 million per year to train Ukrainian military officers and encourages the Biden administration to establish a working group with "relevant European allies" as well as appoint a special envoy.

The schedule does not specify whether the Foreign Relations Committee plans to vote on the legislation.

On March 1, the US Defense Department announced a new \$125 million assistance package for Ukraine that included two additional armed Mark VI patrol boats, training, equipment and funding for advisory efforts. Since 2014 the United States has committed more than \$2 billion in security assistance to Ukraine, according to Defense Department.

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US to Boost Relations With Pacific, Caribbean Island Nations - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks to strengthen its relationships with allies in the Pacific, Atlantic and Caribbean through the new Small and Less Populous Island Economies initiative, National Security Council (NSC) spokesperson Emily Horne said in a press release.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and National Economic Council Director Brian Deese co-hosted earlier on Monday a virtual event today with ambassadors and permanent representatives from island countries and territories in the Caribbean, North Atlantic and Pacific regions to boost relations via the new initiative.

"Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Deese invited participants to partner with the United States under the Small and Less Populous Island Economies (SALPIE) Initiative, a new economic cooperation framework designed to strengthen US collaboration with these island economies to counter COVID-19 economic challenges, promote economic recovery, respond to the climate crisis, and advance longer-term shared interests," Horne said in the release on Monday.

The two officials underscored the Biden administration's goal of strengthening the US relationships with its allies, including smaller countries that have not always been at the top of the US diplomatic and economic agenda, Horne added.

SALPIE was designed to strengthen collaboration with island countries and territories by bringing together 29 US departments and agencies to coordinate the cooperation in the areas of economic growth, climate change, development finance, and security, according to the release.

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US Senate Confirms Ex-Boston Mayor Martin Walsh to Be Next Labor Secretary

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US Senate has confirmed former Boston Mayor Martin Walsh to be the next Secretary of Labor.

The Senate confirmed Walsh with a 68-29 vote on Monday.

Walsh previously served as mayor of Boston since 2014 and congressman in the Massachusetts legislature between 1997 to 2014.

The Biden administration has promoted Walsh as a successful mayor who has directed the improvement of Boston's infrastructure.

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UN Chief 'Profoundly Concerned' at Global Rise in Violence Against Asians - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is "profoundly concerned" at the global rise in violence against Asians, including last week's murder of eight Asian women in Atlanta, his deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a statement.

"The Secretary-General is profoundly concerned about the rise of violence against Asians and people of Asian descent during the COVID-19 pandemic," Haq said on Monday. "The world has witnessed horrific deadly attacks, verbal and physical harassment, bullying in schools, workplace discrimination [and] incitement to hatred in the media."

Incitement had also occurred on social media platforms as well as incendiary language by leaders in positions of power, Haq said.

"In some countries, Asian women have been specifically targeted for attack, adding misogyny to the toxic mix of hatred. Thousands of incidents across the past year have perpetuated a centuries-long history of intolerance, stereotyping, scapegoating, exploitation and abuse," he said.

Secretary-General Guterres expressed his full support for the victims and families and stood in solidarity with all those who faced racism and other assaults on their human rights, Haq said.

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Georgia Spa Shootings Suspect May Face Murder, Aggravated Assault Charges - Sheriff

WASHINGTON, March 23 (Sputnik) - The gunman involved in the spa shootings in the US state of Georgia may face malice murder and aggravated assault charges, Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds said in a statement.

"The Cherokee Sheriff's Office continues to investigate the shooting that occurred March 16, 2021," Reynolds said on Monday. "Working with jurisdictions across Georgia, Robert Aaron Long was quickly apprehended and now faces malice murder and aggravated assault charges in our jurisdiction."

Reynolds said that his office will no longer make any comments on the case at this time because the prosecution is ongoing.

Long allegedly shot and killed eight people late Tuesday at massage parlors around the Atlanta metropolitan area in the US state of Georgia.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

- * The United States is anticipating difficult times ahead in its relations with Russia because of the disagreements between the two countries, however, Washington wants to work with Moscow on major issues, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.
- * Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov left the Russian Foreign Ministry without providing any comments after arriving there earlier for consultations on US-Russia relations, a Sputnik correspondent reported.
- * The United States did not accept Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer to hold a conversation with his US counterpart Joe Biden, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS

- * Terrorists shelled Salihin and Al-Firdaws areas in Syria's Aleppo, two civilians were killed and at least 17 wounded, Rear Adm. Alexander Karpov, deputy head of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Warring Parties in Syria, said on Monday.
- * The US State Department on Monday accused Russian and Syrian forces of conducting airstrikes and artillery attacks that killed several civilians in the country's northwest.

YEMEN PEACE TALKS

- * Saudi Arabia has proposed a new initiative to resolve the conflict in Yemen, including a widespread UN-sponsored ceasefire, and is awaiting a response from the Houthis, the kingdom's foreign minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said at a press conference on Monday.
- * The United States welcomes Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government's commitment to a ceasefire in Yemen, State Department spokesperson Jalina Porter told reporters.

BULGARIA EXPELLS RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS

- * The Bulgarian Foreign Ministry on Monday demanded that two Russian diplomats in Sofia, who have been declared persona non grata, leave the country within the next 72 hours, Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva said on Monday.
- * Bulgaria's decision to declare Russian diplomats personae non gratae is groundless, and Russia reserves the right to respond, the Russian Embassy in Sofia said.
- * NATO is closely following an investigation into alleged "Russian spy ring" in Bulgaria, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

EU-RUSSIA TALKS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and European Council President Charles Michel held a phone conversation on Monday to discuss various issues, including the Russia-EU relations and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kremlin said.
- * Michel said that the European Union-Russia relations are at a low point and there are disagreements in many areas during a phone conversation with Putin, the European Council said.

TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

* The United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia on Monday issued a joint statement in which they called on China to stop "repressive practices" in the country's province of Xinjiang.

* The Biden administration is evaluating the next steps of the United States' policy toward China following a high-level bilateral meeting last week, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

* China has decided to introduce sanctions against ten European Union officials and four European organizations after accusing them of spreading lies and false information about the Xinjiang region, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

* European Parliament President David Sassoli called the sanctions against EU lawmakers and organizations unacceptable, stressing that such actions by Beijing will have consequences.

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PREVIEW - Blinken Visiting Brussels to Strengthen Alliances With NATO, EU

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is visiting Brussels to reaffirm the United States' commitments to its transatlantic allies in meetings with NATO counterparts and European Union leaders.

"On March 23-24, Secretary Blinken will participate in the NATO Foreign Ministerial where he will meet with NATO Allies and Secretary General Stoltenberg to underscore the Biden administration's determination to strengthen the Transatlantic alliance and reinvigorate our ties with allies through NATO," the State Department said in a statement.

Blinken will also meet with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and will hold talks with Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sophie Wilmes, the statement said.

"The meetings in Brussels reaffirm the United States' commitment to our allies and European partners on our shared agenda," the statement said.

Blinken views the NATO ministerial and the bilateral meetings as an opportunity to discuss the 2030 NATO proposals for the alliance's adaptation, the concerns over China and Russia, as well as climate change, cyber security, combatting terrorism, energy security and other common challenges, the statement also said.

"I think there will be clearly a discussion about Russia at the NATO ministerial and in the margins. We will engage with our allies to discuss different views of Russia and how we can engage with Russia in ways that obviously advance our collective interest but remain very clear-eyed about the challenges that Russia poses," Acting Assistant Secretary of State Philip Reeker said.

Reeker reiterated that the United States seeks "predictable and stable" relations with Russia, but will not shy away from "adversarial elements."

"We expect even as you see in recent days our relationship with Russia to remain a challenge. Clearly NATO is very aware of it. And it is one, I think, we are prepared for," Reeker said.

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Washington Mayor Urges Congress to Grant Statehood to US Capital

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Washington, DC should become a 51st state of the United States and Congress has to support this initiative, Mayor Muriel Bowser said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"I urge all of you to do what our Founding Fathers and over two centuries of lawmakers failed to correct and grant full democracy to DC [District of Columbia] residents through statehood," Bowser told lawmakers. "The incremental enfranchisement of the District has historically been a bipartisan effort but is in no way a substitute for full representation in Congress."

On January 27, a group of US Senate Democrats led by Senator Tom Carper introduced legislation to grant Washington, DC statehood and make it the 51st state of the United States. Bowser tried to challenge the major arguments of the numerous opponents of the idea to change the status of the US capital.

"They say Washington, DC statehood is unconstitutional, even though several constitutional experts have repeatedly declared that to be false," she said. "They say Washington, DC is too small, or our economy is not diverse enough. Even though we're bigger by population than two states and pay more federal taxes per capita than any state, and we pay more total federal taxes than 22 states."

The US Constitution designates the United States capital as a federal district - the District of Columbia - without formal representation in Congress.

Democrats need the support of at least ten Republicans in the US Senate to make Washington, DC a state. However, Republicans have said the effort seeks to expand Democratic interests on Capitol Hill.

Vast majority of Washington, DC residents lean Democrat so granting statehood to the capital is almost certain to enable the Democrats to secure a majority in Congress.

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Biden Nominates Big Tech Critic Lina Khan as Federal Trade Commission Chief

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has nominated Lina Khan for the post of Federal Trade Commission chief, the White House announced on Monday, positioning a fierce critic of Big Tech in a job that looks likely to put greater scrutiny on the technology industry often accused of antitrust violations.

"Today, President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate Lina Khan for Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission," the White House said in a statement.

Khan is an associate professor of law at Columbia Law School and former counsel in an investigation into digital markets by the US House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law, the release said.

She is well known for a 2017 paper "Amazon's Antitrust Paradox," which lays out what she views as anti-competitive tactics of the e-commerce giant and failures by the US government to address them.

Khan's nomination to the FTC top job is seen as crucial to the administration as it gears to widen scrutiny over big tech names such as Google, Amazon and Facebook that could possibly lead to more antitrust investigations.

Khan, 32, would become the youngest person to serve as FTC chief.

The US Justice Department had already filed an antitrust lawsuit against Google in October for alleged abuse of Internet search.

The action against Google is the most forceful by the US government to ostensibly protect competition in the online search space since the groundbreaking case that began in the late 1990s against Microsoft. The case was filed by the Justice Department during the time of the Trump administration, and Biden's leadership appears in support of that action.

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US Welcomes Saudi Arabia, Yemeni Government's Commitment to Ceasefire - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government's commitment to a ceasefire in Yemen, State Department spokesperson Jalina Porter told reporters on Monday.

"The United States welcomes Saudi Arabia and Republic of Yemen government's commitment to a ceasefire and political process in Yemen," Porter said during a daily briefing.

She called on all parties "to commit seriously to a ceasefire immediately and engage in negotiations under the auspices of UN."

Porter said that US Special Envoy for Yemen Timothy Lenderking has been extensively engaged with all stakeholders "to reach a ceasefire and ease the suffering of the Yemeni people."

Earlier on Monday, Saudi Arabia, which supports the Yemeni government, proposed a widespread United Nations-sponsored ceasefire in Yemen and said it is currently awaiting a response from the rebel Houthi movement.

The Saudi plan provides for the resumption of the operation of the international airport in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a in some directions, the partial lifting of the blockade from the Yemeni port of Al Hudaydah and the channeling of proceeds from the use of the port to the joint account of the northern and southern authorities in the central bank.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels since 2014. The Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched an operation to support Hadi in 2015. The Houthis continue to maintain control over the vast part of the north of the country, including the capital of Sanaa.

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New Yorkers Aged 50+ Eligible for COVID-19 Vaccine Starting Tuesday - Governor

NEW YORK, March 22 (Sputnik) - New York state residents aged 50 and above will be eligible for vaccine shots starting Tuesday morning, Governor Andrew Cuomo said in a statement.

"Starting tomorrow at 8 AM [12:00 p.m. GMT], all New Yorkers aged 50+ will be eligible for the vaccine," Cuomo said via Twitter on Monday.

During a briefing, the governor said the state will have enough to equitably vaccinate New York residents.

New York state has some 19.5 million people, according to a 2019 census. Roughly a quarter of them have been vaccinated for the COVID-19 as of the first week of this month, judging by the 5.5 million doses that state officials said had been administered.

CNBC reported that more US states were moving to meet President Joe Biden's goal of making every adult American age 18 and older eligible for a vaccine by May 1. Biden, who came into office on January 20, set a target of delivering 100 million COVID-19 shots within 100 days, but managed to make good on that promise in less than 60 days.

Since then, the president has pushed for a speedier pace of immunization and even predicted that families could hold yard barbecues among themselves by the Fourth of July Independence Day holiday.

Aside from New York, Florida on Monday became the latest state to begin vaccinating residents age 50 and older. Texas expanded eligibility to the age group beginning last week.

New York was the biggest COVID-19 hotspot at the height of the pandemic last year. At the peak of the outbreak in April, the state had about 18,000 people in hospital and there were roughly 800 people dying a day from complications caused by the virus.

On Sunday, COVID-19 hospitalizations in New York were at 4,355, with 54 fatalities.

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FBI, US Attorney Condemn Violence Against Asian Americans - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Senior FBI officials from three field offices and a federal US attorney on Monday condemned acts of violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in a statement that comes a week after a lethal shooting spree at three Asian spas in Atlanta.

On March 16, a gunman shot eight people dead, a majority of them Asian, during a shooting spree at massage parlors in the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area. FBI Director Chris Wray after the incident said it did not appear that the crime was racially motivated.

"The US Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia and the FBI condemn all acts of violence, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the nation and in our communities," the release from the four officials said.

On Sunday, US Senator Tammy Duckworth during an interview said she disagreed with Wray's assessment and wants a deeper probe into the matter. NBC News also on Sunday reported, however, that US authorities have yet to find concrete evidence that would support hate crime charges.

In the statement, Acting US Attorney Raj Parekh said hate crimes and discrimination against anyone, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, are reprehensible acts.

"We will not stand still amid the horrific reports of racist and xenophobic acts of violence targeting Asian American and Pacific Islander individuals and communities nationwide," he said. FBI's Washington Field Office Assistant Director Steven D'Antuono, in the same release, said such hate crimes can have a devastating impact and bring fear to entire communities in the US. The statement specified that the condemnation comes from Parekh, D'Antuono and FBI agents in charge of two field offices in Virginia.

According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, the incidence of hate crimes against Asian Americans rose by 149% in 2020 in 16 major cities compared with 2019.

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US, UK, Canada Call on China to End 'Repressive Practices' in Xinjiang - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia on Monday issued a joint statement in which they called on China to stop its "repressive practices" in the Xinjiang province.

"We are united in calling for China to end its repressive practices against Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, and to release those arbitrarily detained," the joint statement released by the US State Department said.

The five allies accused China of imposing what they call "severe restrictions" on religious freedoms, using forced labor, forced sterilizations and other abuses against the ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

"We underline the importance of transparency and accountability and call on China to grant the international community, including independent investigators from the United Nations, journalists, and foreign diplomats, unhindered access to Xinjiang," the statement said. China should stop the human rights violations, the statement added.

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US Military Launches 'Chill Drill' App to Help Personnel Manage Stress - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US armed forces have released a new mobile application, or app, to help their military personnel manage stress levels, the Department of Defense announced in a press release on Monday.

"The Department of Defense launched a new mobile app designed to help the military community manage stress," the release said. "The free Chill Drills by Military OneSource mobile app is now available for download on Google Play and Apple's App Store."

The Chill Drills app includes a collection of mindfulness audio exercises that give service members and military families access to expert stress-relieving techniques, the release said. The techniques can help to slow heart rates, lower blood pressure, reduce the levels of stress hormones in the body, improve sleep quality and the ability to fall asleep and encourage muscle relaxation, the release also said.

"The Department of Defense is thrilled to deliver one of our most popular and highly-requested web products in the form of a new mobile application, so the military community can regenerate and be well anytime and anywhere," Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy Patricia Montes Barron said in the release.

To ensure the Chill Drills app continues to meet the needs of the military community, the department will review and evaluate the new app to help inform ongoing updates and enhancements, the release added.

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N. Korean National Extradited to US Over Scheme to Launder Money - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - A North Korean national has been extradited to the United States for his role in laundering money in the US financial system to provide the North Korean government with luxury items, the US Department of Justice said on Monday.

"After nearly two years of legal proceedings, Mun Chol Myong (Mun), 55, a national of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has been extradited to the United States," the Justice Department said in a press release. "This case represents the first ever extradition to the United States of a DPRK national. Mun is accused of laundering money through the US financial system as part of a scheme to provide luxury items to the DPRK."

From April 2013 to November 2018, Mun violated US and UN sanctions by laundering up to \$1.5 million in banks on behalf of North Korean entities, the release said.

The Justice Department said Mun had ties to North Korea's main intelligence organization, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, which is designated by the United States and the United Nations.

The release did not disclose where Mun was extradited from but it noted that he faces six counts of money laundering in the United States and has already made his initial appearance in federal court.

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McKinsey Consultants Pay \$45Mln to Settle Opioid Marketing Probe - Nevada Attorney General

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - McKinsey & Company has paid \$45 million to resolve investigations into the role that the firm played in Nevada's opioid epidemic by advising drug producers how best to market them, state Attorney General Aaron Ford said in a press release on Monday.

"Today, Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford announced a settlement with one of the world's largest consulting firms, McKinsey & Company, to resolve investigations into the company's role in Nevada's opioid epidemic," the release said. "As a result of this settlement, Nevada will receive \$45 million."

The state of Nevada's filings in court described how McKinsey advised opioid manufacturers, including OxyContin producer Purdue Pharma for more than a decade, the release said.

"Nevada is a hardest hit state by the opioid crisis and is owed a great deal of compensation and justice. I applaud McKinsey's decision to step forward to address the opioid crisis and the particular devastation it caused here in Nevada," Ford said in the release.

The complaint, filed with the settlement, alleges that McKinsey advised Purdue, and other opioid manufacturers, on how to maximize profits from its opioid products, including targeting high-volume prescribers and using specific messaging to get physicians to prescribe more opioids to more patients, the release said.

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US, UK, Canada Call on China to End 'Repressive Practices' in Xinjiang - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia on Monday issued a joint statement in which they called on China to stop "repressive practices" in the country's province of Xinjiang.

"We are united in calling for China to end its repressive practices against Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, and to release those arbitrarily detained," the joint statement released by the US State Department said.

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Expulsions of Migrants by Biden Administration 'Unfortunate' - US Rights Group

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's decision to continue expelling asylum-seeking migrants at the US border with Mexico is unfortunate because the United States has the resources and capacity to adequately address the issue, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Limon Garza told Sputnik.

"It's unfortunate that the expulsions of migrants is continuing," Garza said. "We have the capacity and resources north of the border for a safe, humane and orderly welcome for people. We must be forward-looking and re-imagine what asylum looks like at the US-Mexico border." Last week, President Joe Biden said in an interview with ABC News that the vast majority of undocumented migrants crossing the US southern border are being turned away. Biden advised asylum-seeking migrants, who are mostly from Central America, not to make the journey to the United States and encouraged them to apply for asylum from their home countries once the US government sets up facilities to process their claims there.

The Biden administration has been required to open up at least four temporary care facilities to hold an influx of migrant children overwhelming US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities in hot spots along the US southern border.

A majority of migrants being apprehended at the border are fleeing poverty and violence in the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Data from CBP shows that about 317,590 migrants have been expelled or turned away immediately since October under a Trump-era public health-related policy known as Title 42. The highest number of migrants expelled in fiscal year 2021 occurred in February with 70,183 expulsions.

The data also shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant increase from the 78,442 migrants apprehended in January. A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

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UNICEF Says Present on Ground at Rohingya Camp in Bangladesh Amid Major Fire

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - The the immediate needs of the children and families, UNICEF and its partners are on the ground at a Rohingya refugee camp in southern Bangladesh amid a major fire to address UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh Tomoo Hozumi said in a statement on Monday.

A massive fire ripped through the Balukhali Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar earlier on Monday, gutting hundreds of tents and another facilities.

"UNICEF and our partners are on the ground addressing the immediate and urgent needs of children and families. UNICEF has mobilized health teams for first aid support as well as volunteers to evacuate refugees from their shelters," Hozumi said.

Hozumi said the fire has already caused enormous devastation, spreading rapidly through refugee camps and displacing thousands of people. While large-scale evacuations have taken place, the full extent of the disaster is yet to be confirmed.

Hozumi also mentioned initial reports that there are children among the injured in addition to children separated from their families.

"UNICEF child protection personnel and their partner organizations are working to assist children in need including separated children," Hozumi said. "Our partners are also delivering emergency supplies and clean drinking water."

According to the UN Refugee Agency, some 860,000 Rohingya refugees are currently based in camps in Cox's Bazar district after fleeing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

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US Bombers Integrate With Norwegian F-35s Near Iceland - Strategic Command

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Two US bombers and four Norwegian F-35 conducted a Bomber Task Force Mission near the coast of Iceland, Strategic Command said in a release on Monday.

"A US Air Force B-2 Spirit aircraft from the 509th Bomb Wing, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, and a U.S. B-1B Lancer from the 7th Bomb Wing, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, flew a Bomber Task Force mission off the coast of Iceland, March 19, 2021," the release said. "The bombers integrated with four Norwegian F-35 Lightning aircraft that are currently fulfilling NATO's Icelandic Air Policing mission."

The US and Norwegian aircraft began their mission from three different bases on two continents and conducted complex night operations, the release added.

"Integrating fourth and fifth generation aircraft alongside our Norwegian allies is a critical strategic capability for the future success of NATO operations," Gen. Jeff Harrigan said as cited by the release.

Earlier this month, four US bomber aircraft conducted a mission near Iceland to enhance integration in the high north.

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US Rights Group, Biden Admin. Agree on 10-Day Pause in Lawsuit to Stop Migrant Expulsions

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Biden administration have reached an agreement for a ten-day pause on litigation seeking to terminate a policy that allows for immediate expulsion of migrants at the United States' border with Mexico, court documents revealed on Monday.

"The parties jointly request that the deadline for Plaintiffs' reply brief and consideration by the Court of these motions be stayed for an additional ten days," the court document said.

Data from US Customs and Border Protection shows that about 317,590 migrants have been expelled or turned away immediately since October under a Trump-era public health-related

policy known as Title 42. The highest number of migrants expelled in fiscal year 2021 occurred in February with 70,183 expulsions.

The data also shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant increase from the 78,442 migrants apprehended in January. A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

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US Welcomes Saudi Arabia, Yemeni Government's Commitment to Ceasefire - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government's commitment to a ceasefire in Yemen, State Department spokesperson Jalina Porter told reporters on Monday.

"The United States welcomes Saudi Arabia and Republic of Yemen government's commitment to a ceasefire and political process in Yemen," Porter said during a daily briefing. She called on all parties "to commit seriously to a ceasefire immediately and engage in negotiations under the auspices of UN."

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US to Integrate AstraZeneca Vaccine Into Distribution Process If Approved - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will incorporate the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine into its distribution process if it is approved by the appropriate agencies, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"For any vaccine that's approved we would integrate it into our distribution process equitably," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked if the Biden administration had plans to distribute the AstraZeneca vaccine if approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Psaki said there is a shortage of vaccine supply around the United States and around the world, adding that the novel coronavirus pandemic is ongoing and the new variants of the disease are unpredictable.

A recent US study determined that the AstraZeneca vaccine is 79 percent effective against preventing an infection while being 100 percent effective in severe or critical cases.

On Thursday, the European Medicines Agency said that it had found no link between the AstraZeneca vaccine administration and instances of blood clots forming in inoculated people. The research was carried out following a decision of a number of European countries, including Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, the Netherlands, Iceland and Norway, to suspend the use of the vaccine after reports of a number of cases of blood clotting.

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Biden Has Concerns With Death Penalty as Currently Implemented - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has strong concerns over whether the death penalty as currently implemented fits with American values, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said in a press briefing on Monday.

The US Supreme Court agreed to review a lower court's decision to toss out the death sentence for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of two brothers convicted in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the court's order list showed on Monday.

"President Biden... has grave concerns about whether capital punishment as currently implemented is consistent with the values that are fundamental to our sense of justice and fairness," Psai said. "He has also expressed his horror at the events of that day and Tsarnaev's actions."

She reminded me that the vice president he spoke on the one-year anniversary of the Boston bombing when he said, "we are Boston. We are America. We own the finish line."

A federal appeals court on July 31 reversed three of Tsarnaev's convictions, scrapped his death sentence and ordered a new trial in his case. The Justice Department under the Trump administration filed an appeal against the ruling in the Supreme Court.

The Obama administration, in which current President Joe Biden served as vice president, successfully sought the death penalty against Tsarnaev.

However, during his election campaign, Biden promised to try to abolish all federal death sentences. The Court will not hear the case until the fall.

The Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013, killed three people and injured hundreds of others. Tsarnaev was sentenced to death by lethal injection in May 2015.

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US Places 17,000 Radio Ads in Central, South America to Discourage Migration - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has placed more than 17,000 radio advertisements in Central and South America discouraging migrants from coming to the US southern border at this time, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We have placed an estimated 17,118 radio ads in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras since January 21 in Spanish, Portuguese, in six indigenous languages. These ads played on 33 radio stations, reaching an estimated 15 million individuals," Psaki said during a press briefing.

The US State Department has also worked with Facebook and Instagram on an advertising campaign to push the Biden administration's message that now is not the time to migrate to the United States, Psaki said.

Psaki also said the Biden administration will ramp up these efforts in the coming months. The White House does not view the current influx of migrants coming to the US-Mexico border as a crisis, considering they are fleeing violence in their home countries, Psaki added. Data from US Customs and Border Protection data shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant jump from 78,442 migrants that were apprehended in January. A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October. Last week, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the United States this year is on pace to apprehend more undocumented migrants at its southern border than it has in the last 20 years due a surge in immigration.

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US Cannot Afford Any Delay, Pause in Nuclear Weapons Modernization Program - Senator

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration cannot afford to take the time to conduct a Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) in the \$1.5 trillion, 30-year US nuclear weapons modernization program, US Senator Deb Fischer, lead Republican on the Senate Strategic Forces Subcommittee, said on Monday.

"We shouldn't be conducting an NPR to pause nuclear modernization: That shouldn't happen," Fischer told a podcast hosted by the Heritage Foundation. "We don't have the luxury of delaying these important programs."

Since 1989, the United States has not had the industrial capability to produce new plutonium warheads, Fischer said.

"The modernization schedule has no room for delay. ... We are now facing the very real prospect of systems aging out before replacements are available. We do not have the luxury of putting things on hold while policy reviews are conducted. We will have a gap in our nuclear capabilities," Fischer said.

The work to rebuild US nuclear production capability had to start immediately although the Biden administration had yet to announce its own position and policy on the issue, Fischer added.

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US Expects 'Tough Days' With Russia, But Wants to Work on Key Issues - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is anticipating difficult times ahead in its relations with Russia because of the disagreements between the two countries, however, Washington wants to work with Moscow on major issues, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in an interview on Monday.

"We believe that we are going to have tough days with Russia because there are issues on which we profoundly disagree and actions we need to respond to forcefully," Sullivan told MSNBC. "We also believe that we can work with Russia on key issues including the nuclear question where just in the last few weeks, we have extended the New START agreement by five years. This will not be an easy relationship. It will have significant challenges. It will require America to stand up for its interests."

Sullivan also said in an interview that the United States and Russia can work together in some areas in a stable and predictable manner.

"There are also areas where the United States and Russia can work together in a stable and predictable way in common interest of both of our countries," he said.

In a Tuesday interview, Biden told ABC News that Russian President Vladimir Putin would "pay a price" for allegedly interfering in the 2020 US presidential election. When asked if he considered the Russian president to be a "killer," Biden replied in the affirmative.

The following day recalled its ambassador home for consultations on the future of the US-Russia bilateral relationship. In addition, Putin responded to Biden's comments by wishing the US president good health and suggesting that people often see their own traits in others.

Putin also invited Biden to hold an open online discussion on Friday or Monday.

Earlier on Monday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said the United States did not accept Putin's offer to hold an online conversation with Biden, adding that another opportunity to find a way out of the deadlock in bilateral relations was missed and the United States is to blame for it.

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North Korea Capable of Making Nuclear Weapons But US 'Actually Can Not' - Senator

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - North Korea and other nations such as Iran have the capability to produce new nuclear warheads from plutonium pits but the United States still lacks the capacity to do so, US Senator Deb Fischer, leading Republican on the Strategic Forces Subcommittee said in a podcast on Monday.

"North Korea is capable of manufacturing nuclear weapons but the United States actually can't," Fischer told the podcast hosted by the Heritage Foundation. "I think we've become very very complacent in this country."

The United States had to restart pit production of plutonium warheads if the United States was to remain a nuclear power, Fischer said.

"If the United States is serious about remaining a nuclear power, we have to have pit production capability," she added.

Fischer acknowledged there was broad bipartisan support in Congress for the \$1.5 trillion 30-year-long nuclear modernization program that was launched by former President Barack Obama and continued by former President Donald Trump.

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US, Russia Can Work Together in 'Stable and Predictable Way' on Some Areas - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia can work together in some areas in a stable and predictable manner, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in an interview on Monday.

"There are also areas where the United States and Russia can work together in a stable and predictable way in common interest of both of our countries," Sullivan told MSNBC.

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US May Face Delays in Developing Vital Technologies For Hypersonic Weapons - Report

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States still lacks several vital mature technologies to construct and deploy its own hypersonic missiles and uncertainty over their development may significantly delay the program, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) warned in a report on Monday.

"We identified a number of critical technologies that were not fully mature at the time of program start, which could create challenges for meeting program objectives," the report said. The GAO warned in the report that the US Defense Department has taken several steps to mitigate these challenges but some problems remained unaddressed.

"These issues range from those posed by immature technologies and aggressive schedules to significant cost uncertainties and industrial base and human capital workforce challenges," the report said.

Many of the difficulties arose from the fact that the hypersonic systems were technically complex and were subjected to extreme conditions over the course of flight, the report added.

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US Appoints Diplomat Ricardo Zuniga as Special Envoy for 'Northern Triangle' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has appointed career diplomat Ricardo Zuniga to serve as Special Envoy for the so-called "Northern Triangle" countries in Central America, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price announced on Monday.

"The Department of State is pleased to announce that Ricardo Zuniga, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, will serve as its Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle," Price said in a statement.

Price explained that Zuniga will lead the United States' diplomatic efforts, advise the Secretary of State and Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and coordinate with the National Security Council on the administration's efforts to stop irregular migration to the United States.

"The Special Envoy will engage with regional governments, including but not limited to Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, on a range of issues in order to seek to improve conditions in Central America," he said. "He also will hold our partners accountable for their commitments to address root causes of migration and the increase in arrivals of unaccompanied children at the U.S. southern border. Additionally, the Special Envoy will engage stakeholders in civil society and the private sector as we work toward building better futures in these countries." Price also said that Zuniga, who will accompany White House senior officials to Mexico and Guatemala this week, will keep Congress apprised of the Biden administration efforts.

An influx of migration from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala is expected to continue for the foreseeable future and humanitarian groups must be prepared to deal with the situation, Deputy High Commissioner for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Kelly Clements said earlier in March.

President Joe Biden denied reports that there is an immigration crisis on the US-Mexico border, adding that his administration will be able to handle the influx of migrants arriving at the southern border.

The latest data from US Customs and Border Protection shows that the number of apprehensions of illegal migrants at the southern border has increased since April 2020, reaching more than 70,000 each month between October and January.

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California, 2 Southwestern States See Growing Cases of COVID-19 Variants - CDC Chief

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - California, Nevada and Arizona are seeing a greater percentage of cases attributed to the new COVID-19 variants, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a briefing on Monday. "Increasingly, states are seeing a growing proportion of COVID-19 cases attributed to variants. The newly identified variant B.1.4.2.7/B.1.4.2.9 is estimated to account for 52 percent of cases in California, 41 percent in Nevada and 25 percent in Arizona. And B.1.1.7 variant is estimated to be responsible for 9 percent of cases in New Jersey and 8 percent in Florida," Walensky said. Walensky added that COVID-19 statistics vary across the US with the Northeast and upper Midwest seeing a new significant rise in cases and this should serve as a warning sign for the American people who support continued relaxation of preventive measures. According to CDC data, while deaths continue to drop they remain at high levels and in the past week the rate of declining deaths has slowed. Walensky also noted that there has been a 1.7 percent increase in the number of registered cases in the last week with the current 7-day case average reaching 53,797 versus 52,916 the week before. The US today has 29.8 million cases and about 542,000 deaths associated with the virus, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

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Spending on Hypersonic Missiles to Fall By \$1Bn Annually By 2024 - Report

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US annual spending on the development of hypersonic missiles will peak this year at \$2.5 billion and is estimated to then drop by \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion in fiscal year 2024, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said in a report released on Monday. "Total DOD [Department of Defense] spending on hypersonic weapon development peaked in fiscal 2020 and will fall by nearly \$1 billion annually by fiscal 2024," the report, entitled "Hypersonic Weapons," said. Combined spending on technology and product development of the system would level off and drop over the next four fiscal years although spending on product development within that total would increase to just under \$2 billion a year, the report said. "The GAO identified 70 efforts to develop hypersonic weapons and related technologies that are estimated to cost almost \$15 billion from fiscal years 2015 through 2024," the report added. The majority of total funding in this period is directed to the product development of offensive hypersonic weapon prototypes, according to the report.

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White House Says US Evaluating 'Appropriate Next Steps' on China

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is evaluating the next steps of the United States' policy toward China following a high-level bilateral meeting last week, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We will be evaluating what the appropriate next steps are in close coordination with our partners and allies around the world," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki also said the Biden administration believes China is noticing that the United States is engaging in closer coordination with allies and partners.

On Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan held a meeting with Chinese State Councilor Wang Yi and Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi in Alaska.

The US and Chinese delegations discussed trade and economic issues, cybersecurity, climate change, strategic security issues, as well as the Iranian nuclear deal, the situation in Afghanistan, the Korean Peninsula and Myanmar, as well as agreed to maintain and strengthen contacts and coordination on these issues.

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US State Dept. Accuses Russia of Airstrikes That Killed Civilians in Syria

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US Department of State accused on Monday Russian and Syrian forces of airstrikes and artillery attacks that killed several civilians in the country's northwest.

Russia, whose military contingent has been assisting Syria in its fight against global terrorism since 2015, is yet to respond to the allegations.

"The United States strongly condemns reported Assad regime artillery attacks and Russian airstrikes that killed civilians in western Aleppo and Idlib, yesterday," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

He alleged that a reported artillery shelling on the Al-Atareb Surgical Hospital in western Aleppo killed several patients, including a child, and injured more than a dozen medical staff.

Additionally, Price claimed that Russian airstrikes struck Idlib near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey, reportedly killing one civilian and putting access to much needed assistance at risk.

During his latest briefing on March 18, Rear Admiral Alexander Karpov, deputy head of the Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria, said that the Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist group (banned in Russia) had shelled Syria's Idlib de-escalation zone 36 times over the past 24 hours. Karpov also accused the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist

organization (banned in Russia) of preparing provocations with the use of poisonous substances in Idlib.

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Blinken, Libyan Counterpart Stress Need to Fully Implement Ceasefire - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Libyan interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba on Monday held a telephone conversation in which they emphasized the need for full implementation of the ceasefire agreement in Libya, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"Secretary Blinken and interim Prime Minister Dabaiba emphasized the importance of ending the conflict through an inclusive political process, providing essential public services, and ensuring free, fair, and credible elections on December 24, 2021," Price said. "The Secretary and the interim Prime Minister also stressed the need for full implementation of the ceasefire agreement signed on October 23, 2020, including the removal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without delay."

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UN Welcomes Saudi Initiative to End Conflict in Yemen - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has welcomed the new initiative proposed by Saudi Arabia on Monday to bring the conflict in Yemen to an end which aligns with the UN-led efforts on the matter, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said in a press briefing.

Earlier on Monday, Saudi Arabia proposed a widespread United Nations-sponsored ceasefire in Yemen and said it is currently awaiting a response from the rebel Houthi movement.

"We welcome today's announcement by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of its intention to undertake a number of measures to help end the conflict in Yemen, which align with the UN's initiative," Haq said. "We also welcome Saudi support for UN efforts."

Haq also said UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths will be engaging with all relevant parties, including the Houthis, to explore whether the United Nations can move forward on the Saudi initiative.

The Saudi plan provides for the resumption of the operation of the international airport in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a in some directions, the partial lifting of the blockade from the Yemeni port of Al Hudaydah and the channeling of proceeds from the use of the port to the joint account of the northern and southern authorities in the central bank.

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US Seeks Further Dialogue With Turkey on S-400 Bilaterally and Through NATO - Diplomat

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue discussions with Turkey bilaterally and through NATO on issues related to Ankara's purchase of Russian-made S-400 air defense systems, US mission to NATO Charge d'Affaires Douglas Jones told reporters on Monday.

"The United States has been very clear about how we view Turkey's purchase of the S-400. We oppose the purchase of the S-400," Jones said during an online briefing. "We will continue to discuss with Turkey issues related to the S-400 both through our bilateral contacts with Turkey and here at NATO. And we will continue to work here at NATO together as we plot the way ahead."

Jones reiterated the United States' stance that the presence of "a large Russian weapon system such as the S-400" has no place in NATO.

"It also contravenes commitments that allies made to each other that we would wind off the dependency on Russian weapons systems," he said.

Jones praised Turkey as "a very valued ally" in NATO and a strong supporter of the alliance and a major contributor to its operations.

The purchase of S-400 batteries has been a major flashpoint of tensions in the US-Turkey relations since 2019. The United States demands that Turkey abandon the deal in favor of US-made Patriot systems. It has suspended Turkey's participation in the F-35 jet program and imposed sanctions on the Turkish Presidency of Defense Industries under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

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White House Says US Evaluating 'Appropriate Next Steps' on China

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is evaluating the next steps of the United States' policy toward China following a high-level bilateral meeting last week, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We will be evaluating what the appropriate next steps are in close coordination with our partners and allies around the world," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki also said the Biden administration believes China is noticing that the United States is engaging in closer coordination with allies and partners.

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Canada Sanctions 4 Chinese Officials, 1 Entity in Coordination With US, UK

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials and one entity in coordination with the United States and the United Kingdom over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang province, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"Today, Canada announced it is imposing new sanctions against 4 officials and 1 entity under the Special Economic Measures (People's Republic of China) Regulations, based on their participation in gross and systematic human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The measures are being introduced in coordination with the United States, the United Kingdom and in solidarity with the European Union, the statement explained.

Canada is sanctioning Zhu Hailun, former XUAR Deputy Party Secretary who is alleged to be the mastermind behind the human rights, three Xinjiang province security officials - Wang Junzheng, Wang Mingshan, Chen Mingguo - and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau, the statement said.

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Canadian Court Allows Hotel Quarantine Plan to Continue Despite Allowing Case to Progress

TORONTO, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government will be allowed continue enforcing its contentious out-of-pocket hotel quarantine program while a legal challenge against it winds its way through the court system, an Ontario judge ruled on Monday.

The Trudeau government's requirement for all incoming air passengers into Canada to quarantine for three days at their own expense at a state-designated hotel is being challenged in court by the Canadian Constitution Foundation (CCF), which argues the practice violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and had asked for an interim injunction in the case.

"The motion is dismissed," Ontario Superior Court of Justice judge Fred Myers said in the ruling.

"I do not see why the main constitutional hearing needs to await another injunction hearing."

Myers said that the interim injunction application was filed in order to halt enforcement of the program while the government prepared an evidentiary response. However, the Ontario court justice said that he received a full injunction argument from government attorneys much faster than expected.

The CCF issued a statement calling the court ruling bittersweet, but pointed out that the court did recognize the applicants in the challenge have sympathetic stories and the constitutional questions need to be heard on the merits.

"The court also acknowledged that the applicants' section 7 Charter liberty interests are engaged by the quarantine hotel policy," CCF Litigation Director Christine Van Geyn said in a statement.

Canada's Justice Department did not immediately respond to Sputnik's request for a comment.

Canada's Conservative Party, led by Shadow Minister for Health Michelle Rempel Garner, has called on the Trudeau government to suspend the hotel quarantine program and introduce an at-home quarantine verification system by properly trained and vetted security agents. Although the Canadian government is constitutionally prohibited from barring citizens from leaving the country, the Trudeau government has used the enhanced border security measures to discourage international travel amid the pandemic. All entrants into Canada must complete a mandatory 14-day quarantine. As of March 25, 2020, Quarantine Act violators may be subject to a fine of up to \$537,000 and/or imprisonment for six months. The measure came into effect on February 22 and will expire on April 21 if the government chooses not to extend it.

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US Officials to Travel to Mexico, Guatemala for Talks on Migration - White House

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Senior US administration officials Ambassador Roberta Jacobson and Juan Gonzalez will travel to Mexico and Guatemala this week to discuss plans to develop a strategy to manage the flow of migration from Central America to the US southern border, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said on Monday.

"Special Assistant to the President and Coordinator for the Southwest Border, Ambassador Roberta Jacobson will travel to Mexico on March 22 to engage with Mexican government officials to develop an effective and humane plan of action to manage migration," Horne said in a press release.

Gonzalez, who serves as the US Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, will also attend talks in Mexico and then proceed to visit Guatemala to meet with government officials and non-government organizations to discuss the root causes of migration, Horne said.

Data from US Customs and Border Protection shows that 100,441 migrants were apprehended at the US southern border in February, a significant jump from 78,442 migrants that were apprehended in January. A total of 396,958 migrants have been apprehended at the US southern border in fiscal year 2021, which began in October.

Last week, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the United States this year is on pace to apprehend more undocumented migrants at its southern border than it has in the last 20 years due a surge in immigration.

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US Appoints Diplomat Ricardo Zuniga as Special Envoy for 'Northern Triangle' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has appointed career diplomat Ricardo Zuniga to serve as Special Envoy for the so-called "Northern Triangle" countries in Central America, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price announced on Monday.

"The Department of State is pleased to announce that Ricardo Zuniga, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, will serve as its Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle," Price said in a statement.

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US Imposes New Myanmar-Related Sanctions on 2 Individuals, 2 Entities - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new Myanmar-related sanctions on two individuals, including the Deputy Minister for Home Affairs and Chief of Burma Police Force, and two divisions of the country's armed forces, the Treasury Department said in a notice on the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) website on Monday.

"The following individuals have been added to OFAC's SDN List: HLAING, Than... SOE, Aung," the notice said. "The following entities have been added to OFAC's SDN List: 33RD LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISION OF THE BURMESE ARMY...77TH LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISION OF THE BURMESE ARMY."

The Treasury Department said in a press release that Hlaing is the chief of the Burma Police Force and has been engaged in the violent crackdown of protesters opposing the military coup. Soe is a Bureau of Special Operations commander and has also served a role in the crackdown of protesters, the release said.

The release added that the two designated infantry divisions have been involved in violence against protesters.

The Treasury Department also imposed Xinjiang-related sanctions on two individuals, Mingguo Chen and Junzheng Wang.

Wang is secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and Mingguo is director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau. Both officials have been designated under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act for human rights abuses against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the release said.

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US in No Rush to Launch Digital Currency - Federal Reserve Chairman

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve is not in a rush to launch a digital currency because such a move may pit the US central bank against commercial banks to compete for funds and destabilize the financial system, Chairman Jerome Powell said on Monday.

"We're not in a mode of trying to make a decision at this point," Powell told a virtual conference of senior officials from the Bank for International Settlements. "We don't need to rush this project."

Powell said the Federal Reserve needs to be at the cutting edge of financial innovation because it is the central bank for the world's reserve currency, but that obligation should not come at the risk of compromising the stability of the US financial system.

"We're sort of purveyors of macroeconomic stability, price stability and financial stability. We have a two-tier system where the central bank interfaces with banks and they interface with the public. We do not want to destabilize that and, therefore... compete with banks for funding," he said.

Powell pointed out that crypto assets, including the industry standard Bitcoin, were highly volatile by nature and did not have intrinsic value to make them a store of value on their own.

"It's more a speculative asset that's essentially a substitute for gold rather than for the dollar.

The public needs to understand the risks. Volatility [aside], there's also the outsized energy requirements requirement for mining [them]," he said.

The US authorities have repeatedly expressed reservations about legitimizing crypto assets into the financial system, with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen citing concerns about a run on banking deposits and the potential for money laundering, among others.

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Blinken in Call With Saudi Top Diplomat Condemns Attacks From Iran-Aligned Groups

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Saudi Arabia's top diplomat Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and denounced the recent attacks against the country's oil facilities from Iran-aligned groups, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a readout of the conversation on Monday.

"Secretary Blinken reiterated our commitment to supporting the defense of Saudi Arabia and strongly condemned the recent attacks against Saudi territory from Iranian-aligned groups in the region," Price said. "The Secretary and the Foreign Minister discussed their close cooperation to support the efforts of UN Special Envoy Griffiths and US Special Envoy Lenderking to end the conflict in Yemen, starting with the need for all parties to commit to a ceasefire and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid."

Price noted that the two officials also discussed the need to stabilize Yemen's economy.

"The Secretary underscored the importance of continued progress on human rights and expressed support for Saudi Arabia's ongoing social and economic reforms," he said.

On Friday, Houthi military spokesman Yahia Saria confirmed that the rebel movement conducted six drone attacks on facilities belonging to the Saudi Aramco oil company in Riyadh a day earlier. A Saudi Energy Ministry source told the SPA news agency that the attack did not result in any casualties. Several countries, including the United States, denounced the attack as an attempt to disrupt global energy supplies.

The war in Yemen between the government forces and the Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, has been ongoing since 2014. In 2015, a Saudi-led coalition joined the war in support of Yemen's government.

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US Supreme Court to Consider Reinstating Death Sentence For Boston Marathon Bomber - Order

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court has agreed to review a lower court's decision to toss out the death sentence for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of two brothers convicted in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the court's order list showed on Monday. "United States v Tsarnaev, Dzhokhar A. The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted," the Supreme Court said.

A federal appeals court on July 31 reversed three of Tsarnaev's convictions, scrapped his death sentence and ordered a new trial in his case. The Justice Department under the Trump administration filed an appeal against the ruling in the Supreme Court.

The Obama administration, in which current President Joe Biden served as vice president, successfully sought the death penalty against Tsarnaev.

However, during his election campaign, Biden promised to try to abolish all federal death sentences. The Court will not hear the case until the fall.

The Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013, killed three people and injured hundreds of others. Tsarnaev was sentenced to death by lethal injection in May 2015.

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Facebook Says Removed 1.3Bln Fake Accounts in October-December of 2020

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - Facebook has removed more than 1.3 billion fake accounts from its platform between October and December of 2020 in an effort to tackle misinformation, company's Vice-President of Integrity Guy Rosen said in a statement on Monday.

"We take a hard line against this [fake accounts] activity and block millions of fake accounts each day, most of them at the time of creation. Between October and December of 2020, we disabled more than 1.3 billion of them," Rosen said.

Rosen explained that Facebook has created a global network of more than 80 fact-checkers to review content in more than 60 languages who are able to mark content as false and let regular users know if a post presents misinformation. In 95 percent of the cases, users do not click on a post if they see a warning notification.

Facebook started labeling information from trusted sources to connect people to the information the company considers as reliable, including the COVID-19 Information Center, Climate Science Information Center and US 2020 Voting Information, the statement added.

Earlier this month, Facebook announced its new strategy to start targeting groups and members on its platform who break its so-called "community standards" by restricting their reach or completely taking them down.

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US Study Finds AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine to be 79% Effective, Safe - Company Statement

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - A US study has determined that the AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19 is 79 percent effective at preventing infection while also showing 100% efficacy against severe or critical disease and hospitalization, the company said on Monday.

"The AstraZeneca US Phase III trial of AZD1222 demonstrated statistically significant vaccine efficacy of 79% at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 and 100% efficacy at preventing severe disease and hospitalisation," the release said.

The company also said its study did not identify any safety concerns regarding the vaccine, including no increased risk of blood clots.

"The vaccine was well tolerated, and the independent data safety monitoring board (DSMB) identified no safety concerns related to the vaccine," it said.

The company said the interim safety and efficacy analysis was based on a scientific trial involving 32,449 participants accruing 141 symptomatic cases of COVID-19.

The company said it would continue to assess the data and expects to submit its primary analysis to the US Food and Drug Administration to seek Emergency Use Authorization in the coming weeks.

"Over the recent weeks, a number of countries have temporarily halted the use of the vaccine developed by the UK-Swedish pharmaceutical company following reports on isolated cases of post-inoculation side effects, such as thrombosis, allegedly leading to deaths.

On Thursday, the European Medicines Agency said that it had found no link between AstraZeneca vaccine administration and blood clots in inoculated people. The research was carried out following a decision of a number of European countries, including Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, the Netherlands, Iceland and Norway, to suspend the use of the vaccine after reports on isolated cases of blood clotting in vaccinated people.

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Americans See Cyberterrorism as Main Threat Facing US Above Nuclear Menace - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - More than 80 percent of Americans now see cyberterrorism as the top threat facing their nation, more dangerous than international terrorism, climate change, global warming or China's economic power, a Gallup poll announced on Monday.

"Eighty two percent of Americans say cyberterrorism is a 'critical threat' to the vital interests of the US over the next decade," Gallup said in a news release. "While cyberterrorism ranks atop a list of 11 potential threats to the US, the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea and by Iran are not far behind."

Some 77 percent of Americans regard North Korea's nuclear weapons as a critical threat, with 75 percent citing Iran's atomic arsenal, Gallup said.

"Four other matters are likewise viewed as critical threats by majorities in the US: international terrorism (72 percent), the spread of infectious diseases throughout the world (72 percent), China's economic power (63 percent), and global warming or climate change (58 percent)," the release said.

Forty-six percent of Americans assess the high numbers of immigrants trying to enter the United States as a critical threat, though the pollsters cautioned that they took their results before the surge in illegal immigration efforts along the US southern border this year, the release added.

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Top US Infectious Disease Official Says Russia's Sputnik Vaccine 'Quite Effective'

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – The Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V is quite effective, top US health official and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said on Monday.

"The Russian one I believe is quite effective," Fauci said on the Hugh Hewitt radio show when asked whether he trusted COVID-19 vaccines from Russia and China. "The data on the Russian vaccine, I've taken a look at some of the reports, it looks pretty good."

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US Air Travel Passengers Top 1.5 Million For First Time Since March 2020 – TSA

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) – The number of air travel passengers screened at US airports exceeded 1.5 million for the first time since March 2020, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) spokesperson Lisa Farbstein said on Monday.

"TSA screened 1,543,115 people yesterday, Sunday, March 21," Farbstein said on Twitter. "The last time checkpoint throughput topped 1.5 million was March 15, 2020 - just more than a year ago."

Sunday was the 11th consecutive day with checkpoint volume exceeding 1 million, she added.

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US, China Climate Envoys to Meet for Virtual Conference on Tuesday - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 22 (Sputnik) - US Special Presidential Envoy John Kerry will join a virtual climate conference this week alongside his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua, despite recent tensions between the two nations, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday, citing people familiar with the meeting.

The two officials will take part in the Ministerial on Climate Action, an annual meeting set up by China and attended by high-level representatives from over 30 countries, the report said. China will chair the meeting, and dozens of officials from European countries and Canada are expected to participate, the report said.

The climate conference comes on the heels of tense talks between US and Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska last week during which the countries' top officials rebuked each others' policies.

The meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and their Chinese counterparts Director of the Office of the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi saw both sides publicly trade diplomatic barbs.

The talks got off to a heated start last Thursday after Blinken said Washington would bring up "deep concerns" about some of China's actions around the world. The remark prompted immediate pushback from Chinese officials at the meeting, who warned the US against meddling in China's "internal affairs."